

**From:** Yeganeh Torbati <[Yeganeh.Torbati@propublica.org](mailto:Yeganeh.Torbati@propublica.org)>

**Date:** Friday, November 1, 2019 at 12:45 PM

**To:** [Pence press email]

**Subject:** FW: ProPublica request for comment

Forwarding to the general address in case missed

Yeganeh Torbati

Reporter, ProPublica

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**From:** Yeganeh Torbati <[Yeganeh.Torbati@propublica.org](mailto:Yeganeh.Torbati@propublica.org)>

**Date:** Friday, November 1, 2019 at 11:57 AM

**To:** [VP press secretary Katie Waldman]

**Subject:** Re: ProPublica request for comment

Hi Katie, just wanted to add a few more questions. I'm happy to jump on the phone to discuss this all with you as well. I also sent you a text message this morning. I've checked my spam and junk folders to make sure your reply hasn't been forwarded there. But please let me know if I've somehow missed your responses – I would hate for that to happen. You can reach me any time at the phone numbers below. My deadline is mid-day Monday.

- I've learned some more details about the call between OVP and USAID that led to Ms. Longi's removal. I understand that the phone call was by former chief of staff Nick Ayers to USAID staff, including chief of staff Bill Steiger. Mr. Ayers stated during the phone call that someone at USAID needed to be punished for perceived failures in Iraq, and as a result, Mr. Green removed Ms. Longi from her position. Does OVP have any comment? Did OVP intend for a career official to lose her job as a result of Mr. Ayers' phone call? Why was Mr. Pence displeased with USAID and what specifically sparked the phone call?
- Which UN programs was Mr. Pence referring to when he said in October 2017 that President Trump had ordered the State Department to stop funding "ineffective" UN relief efforts? Was there ever an order from President Trump to this effect?
- What would OVP say to concerns that were raised by career officials throughout 2017 and 2018 – that directing funding towards religious minorities risks violating U.S. prohibitions on favoring one religious group over another, and that it could worsen sectarian tensions within Iraq?
- Did OVP staff have any involvement with the latest grants in Iraq, made under the New Partnerships Initiative? Did USAID officials communicate with OVP officials about the grants?
- Does the White House/OVP want USAID to expand its focus on religious minorities to countries beyond Iraq? If so, which countries?

Best,

Yeganeh

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**From:** Yeganeh Torbati <[Yeganeh.Torbati@propublica.org](mailto:Yeganeh.Torbati@propublica.org)>

**Date:** Monday, October 28, 2019 at 2:33 PM

**To:** [VP press secretary Katie Waldman]

**Subject:** Re: ProPublica request for comment

Hi Katie, just a couple additional questions on this.

My reporting shows that OVP initially focused on helping Christians, with little attention to Yazidis, but that over time, career officials persuaded OVP officials that Yazidis also deserved some extra U.S. support. Does OVP have any comment?

How much understanding did OVP staffers have in 2017 and 2018 of the U.S. military presence in Iraq, including numbers of troops and their capabilities?

Thanks,  
Yeganeh

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**From:** Yeganeh Torbati <[Yeganeh.Torbati@propublica.org](mailto:Yeganeh.Torbati@propublica.org)>

**Date:** Friday, October 25, 2019 at 3:12 PM

**To:** [VP press secretary Katie Waldman]

**Subject:** Re: ProPublica request for comment

Hi Katie,

I have a few additional questions for this story, which had been delayed this week. My deadline for your responses is Monday COB.

Broadly, the story is about how USAID's processes have been warped, particularly in the Middle East, by pressure placed on the agency by the Vice President's office to give more funding to Christians and other religious minorities in Iraq. Based on my reporting, the perception that foreign aid has been linked to political objectives has undermined USAID's work. If Vice President Pence or his office have any comment on those takeaways, I'd be very glad to include it.

After Ms. Longi was removed from her position, USAID insiders coined a term – she had been “Penced.” My reporting shows that career and political officials felt their jobs were at risk as a result of what happened to her. Does OVP have any comment? Also see my previous questions to you regarding the incident.

Does Vice President Pence's pressure on USAID to give more aid to Christians in Iraq have any link with the fact that it is also a core goal of President Trump's conservative Christian base?

My understanding is Vice President Pence's office communicates much of its wishes for USAID through Bill Steiger, the USAID chief of staff. Can OVP confirm that? What other ways does OVP communicate with USAID officials?

Why did Sarah Makin-Acciani and Steve Pinkos attend the March 2018 meeting in Baghdad that USAID held for potential grant applicants? My understanding of their background shows they have no foreign aid or

development expertise, and other attendees took their presence as a sign of political pressure on the process. What was their purpose in being there?

My reporting also shows that Mark Green was uncomfortable with potential intervention by OVP into the 2018 grant process. Does OVP have any comment?

One person there witnessed Makin-Acciani and Pinkos vehemently objecting to a program idea, saying it would take too long and not be valuable, and appearing to only be interested in “quick fixes.” Do either of them, or OVP in general, have any comment?

My reporting shows that in mid-2018 Vice President Pence was displeased with USAID’s work in Iraq at that point. As I described in my first set of questions to you, that displeasure is what led to Maria Longi’s removal. Does OVP have any comment?

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**From:** Yeganeh Torbati <[Yeganeh.Torbati@propublica.org](mailto:Yeganeh.Torbati@propublica.org)>

**Date:** Friday, October 18, 2019 at 1:22 PM

**To:** [VP press secretary Katie Waldman]

**Subject:** Re: ProPublica request for comment

Sorry, just one additional question here:

- What is the working relationship between the Vice President’s office and USAID official Max Primorac? Is Mr. Primorac frequently in direct contact with OVP?

Yeganeh Torbati  
Reporter, ProPublica

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**From:** Yeganeh Torbati <[Yeganeh.Torbati@propublica.org](mailto:Yeganeh.Torbati@propublica.org)>

**Date:** Thursday, October 17, 2019 at 5:30 PM

**To:** [VP press secretary Katie Waldman]

**Subject:** ProPublica request for comment

Hi Katie,

Hope you’re doing great and that you’re enjoying the new job. I’ve also recently moved on from Reuters and am now at ProPublica. I’m working on a story about USAID’s activities in Iraq, and I have a few questions for the Vice President’s office. My deadline is noon on Monday, Oct. 21.

The story is about USAID’s changing strategy in Iraq over the past couple of years, which has been, as I understand it, a significant priority of the Vice President.

1. **How has the Vice President’s push of this initiative changed the normal process employed by USAID career staff in deciding their grants and strategies?**
2. **What is the Vice President’s view on how USAID’s emphasis on religious and ethnic minorities abides by legal guarantees of the separation of church and state, as well as prohibitions on supporting**

**religious activities?**

3. **What is the Vice President's view on how Christian minorities are faring in Iraq in comparison to the broader Iraqi population victimized by ISIS, including Sunni and Shia Muslims?**
4. **Has the Vice President asked or directed USAID to expand the focus on religious and ethnic minorities to countries beyond Iraq? If so, which countries?**
5. I've seen an internal email in which a senior official in the agency's Middle East bureau, Hallam Ferguson, stated that their activity in Iraq, and increasingly, Syria, had been decided "for us by the White House." **Does the Vice President's office have any comment on this statement by a USAID official?**
6. In June 2018, a senior USAID career official in the Middle East bureau, Maria Longi, lost her job after Mr. Pence became displeased with the agency's work in Iraq, according to news accounts.

After the WSJ published an op-ed in June 2018 criticizing USAID's work in Iraq, I understand Mr. Pence's staff called USAID administrator Mark Green and demanded the removal of a career official and that he then chose to remove Ms. Longi from her job. **Does the Vice President's office have any comment on this account of the events? Does the Vice President believe this incident sent a signal to remaining career officers about what might happen if they object to White House priorities?**

Best,  
Yeganeh